Voices from the Valley

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Foreword

This little volume—the second of what I hope will be many—is what liberal arts education is all about. I myself am not a successful creative artist: my poetry is puerile, my short stories overly clever and unimpressive, my only novel lies in dust. I never moved beyond four-year-old stick figures in the visual arts. My sister-in-law called me names because the simple family photograph she asked me to take came out blurry—the only one on the whole roll which came out blurry, and the only one I took.

But all this notwithstanding, I believe I am a good judge of creative work in many media. Art was my field in college, after all, and one does not lose ALL sense of judgment when one moves out of the classroom and into administration.

And I think the materials in this volume are pretty good--some better than others, but on the whole, pretty darn good. They speak well of the creative energies and directions of the students and staff of this institution. They will continue to do so long after the semester tests are burned, books are resold, and grades are a part of each student's distant memory.

I know this, because in preparation for this preface I dipped into eleven years (21 issues) of another college literary magazine, one which I had the pleasure of helping found and to which I gave, like Shu-Huei Henrickson has given, a lot of time and energy. Those works of creativity were alive again when I read them. Holistically, each issue has a complex message to tell about the life and the culture of that college, a gestalt, if you will, of meaning. I have forgotten the many, many classes I taught; I have forgot-

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ten the many, many faculty and students with whom I came in contact; and I (thankfully) have forgotten the many meetings which rounded out college life for me as a young academic. But, with the help of the issues of creative works I still possess, I have not forgotten what liberal arts education was all about.

The works in these old issues show me that I was a part of an institution involved in preparing diverse students for even more diverse careers, that these students were ever-growing in knowledge and skills, that these creative agents were edging closer and closer to wisdom. Their struggles were often profound, their insights even more so.

In this, the second issue of *Voices from the Valley*, you will find interesting works to read and view. They are both a part of your own liberal education, as well as a demonstration of that education in those who contributed. Experience these works. Talk to the contributors, and talk about the contributors and their creations to others. Enjoy these works. Consider efforts of your own to write a poem, take a picture.

Rock Valley College is a fine institution of higher education. Be a part of it with your involvement in *Voices*. You won't regret it now, and, years from now, you will see its real importance in your own education and growth. I will bet *your* poems won't seem puerile.

Mike Bequette

The Return Address on the Envelope Said Simply "For Your Illusions"

To Whom It May Concern, or To the Hopeless Romantic Shall We Say:

This is to inform you that the letter you were promised has unfortunately gone astray. Maybe it was lost, or maybe it was never sent maybe it was never wrote, who knows exactly where it went?

We regret to bring to your attention at this time, the one who swore they loved you has unfortunately changed their mind. Maybe they've fallen for another, maybe you were just a phase, maybe they just wanted to use you,but whatever do you they don't want to save.

Due to circumstances beyond your control, a promise to you's been broken, and what you've believed in were no more than lies that were spoken.

We're sure that you have questions but the truth can't be exposed, because we're sorry at this time no information can be disclosed.

Our sincerest apologies for this sudden outbreak of confusion, but we thought that someone should give you notification of your illusions.

Kathryn Polemikos

POVERTY

Like a wet blanket, poverty covers the poor;
it smothers the young as they must forage for food.
The weak get weaker, the strong come to their knees,
and the rich don't notice; they think they're free.
"Can anyone help," you're bound to ask.
No, the problem's too great for anyone's task.
Sometimes the government is as poor as their suffering folk
and redistributing the wealth is truly a hoax.
So poverty goes on like the ebb and flow
of a giant tide which no one seems to know
how to stop its rise or hasten its fall,
as the years tick on it will engulf us all.

Poor housing in Old Delhi. This is a common scene throughout much of Asia. It is least prevalent in Japan. (1985)

Photo by Lloyd Hoshaw

There's one good thing about this problem we face,
the poor seem oblivious to their status in life
since they've never known better—it's part of the pace,
if you continue to live, you must continue the strife
of hunting your food in the alleys and dumps;
you can always hope for the best for your children's life.
But some give up hope—we'll never be better;
can a wealthy world lift them out of their gutter?
In the coming century the problem will grow
till that worn, wet blanket smothers them, you know.
A war on poverty is the answer now;
there's alredy been talent lost when it's ready to grow,
in a world where all can share in the stake
of a better place we're able to make.

Lloyd Hoshaw

Fisher people who live under their boats or in a makeshift tent are among the poorest in the world. This scene is from the beach with beautiful Bombay in the background. (1985)

Photo by Lloyd Hoshaw

Profession:
Career Changes in Life

John DiGiocomo

First let me tell you what I do now. I run the Procurement Technical Assistance Center here at RVC. I assist businesses who want to sell to the Federal, State and Local government. Why I do this is a very long story and one that if you have a lot of time and patience I will be happy to impart to you. What I was, was a sculptor and painter. I went to school and learned how to get in touch with my feelings so that I could express myself.

Being an artist/sculptor is like being able to express your thoughts in a three-dimensional form. I have always had a natural impulse to work with clay from the earth, wood from living trees, and stone from the earth. I originally created works that pleased only me, that expressed what I was feeling at a moment. I tried painting and that too satisfied my "moment of expression."

As a beginner sculptor and painter, I studied to find inspiration from a wide range of works, most of them modern; traditional works I found interesting, but not as exciting as impressionist works. I liked the modern free flowing style of Arthur Williams, John Miller and others whose names now escape me. I love to feel the change of

wood, plaster and wire turn into a cool shape that people liked to run their hands over and feel. It gave me great pleasure to see a person see the piece and want to touch it.

The school I attended was Chicago Academy of Fine Arts. It was a good example of the 60's run at commercialization of art and stamping out your basic graphic artist. I sometimes feel that in another environment I would have ended up quite differently and possibily in a different job.

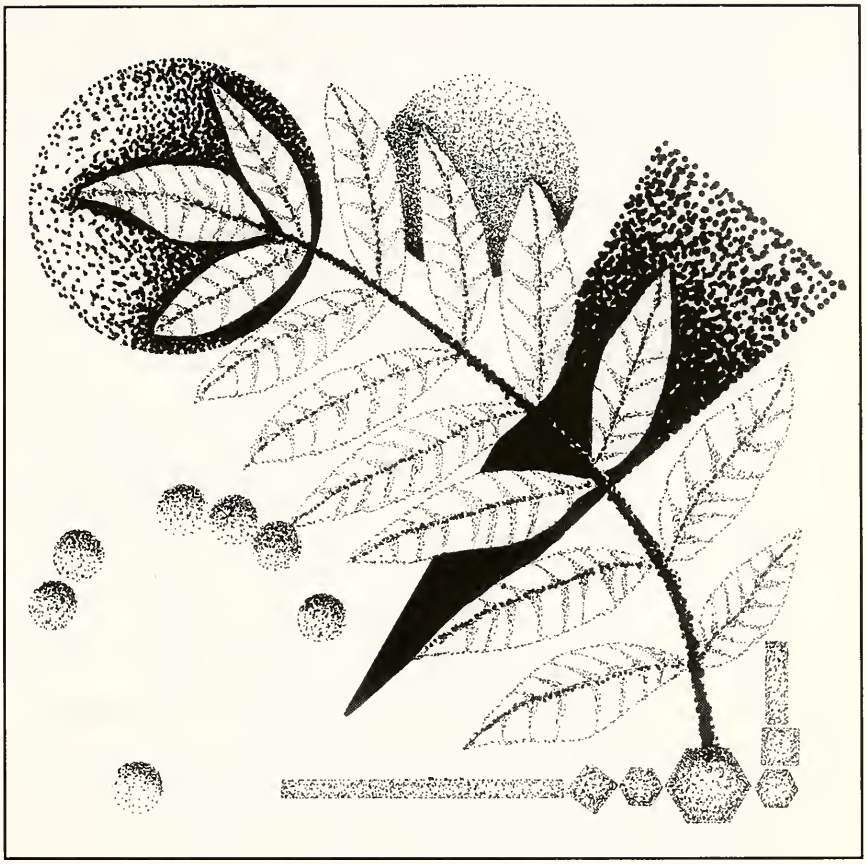
After I left the school, I went into business in the Chicago burbs; there I went from being an artist, designer and creator to being a "salesman" and "businessman." Please excuse the term but it is a term that was used in the 60's and 70's with the meaning of it's a man's world and it meant that you had a certain image to uphold.

Sad but true I found that if I wanted my business to be a success I had to make some choices. I had to look at what I wanted and decide if I wanted to be a successful businessperson. I had to make compromises and decisions based not on what I felt but on what would make the customer happy. You can win the battle and still lose the war. Unfortunately, I learned that the hard way. If you want to pay the rent you must sometimes back off, not your principles but your style of design and art. You must reflect your customers' likes and dislikes. Being an artist you should always be able to do what you feel is creative and free; being a businessperson you need to be flexible and creative with other persons' interpretations of what is "art."

I made a decision that I needed to pay the rent and my employees. I had a responsibility to myself, my partners and employees to make the payroll. As the years went by, I made more and more compromises. My partner who started out being the "salesperson" became the designer, and I became the "salesperson." In the end I had given up my "art" for a "profession."

Today I work in a field that is totally unrelated to what I went to school to learn and what I envisioned myself doing the rest of my life. Since I sold my business and left Chicago, I have at times tried to rekindle the love I had for creating pleasing shapes and designs. I sometimes find myself sitting at my desk or at home or at a meeting drawing a "design" that would turn into a finished piece of wood, plaster or metal, that I hoped would speak to those looking at it. My designs were my way of talking to others, of showing them that I was here and that I made an impact on them. Unfortunately, now I only draw the designs; I take them no further.

If I had to go back and make changes in my life I don't think I would make too many. Perhaps not investing in Microsoft was a major mistake, but on the whole I don't think that I really would change too many things, except this one thing. I would never lose or get out of touch with the ability to create. Creating art, like many things in this life, is like a stream. It flows. If you stop you dam up the stream, eventually you stop it from flowing at all. It's sometimes very hard to break down that dam.



Brian Wobig

The Stapler Wars

Instead of a nice crisp chomp,
instead of the long clean glinting bar,
this time,
the little teeth dutifully grip
the papers' underside,
but the crimped top
sprawls like a tossed doll
or a broken neck.
No matter, down goes the head.
And now a snaggly silver tooth
winks from the lip.
Fragile as hangnail,
it can chew its way into the skin
like a coral snake, blow a thumb
into a pink balloon.
It can pick a lock,
a little one,
It can black out your eye.
You pound.
You shakeshakeshake.
You strike with your pre-emptive shoe.
The jaws clench like a snapper's, like disaster.
You tweeze, you tong it
like a dentist in some goldrush town,
but the impacted thing
snugs down, smug in its jaw,
wiser by far
than you.

Judith Cordary

BEHIND ME

He pulls me up,
up high in the air
Lets me go,
go racing out and up toward the sky.
Terrified, my heart pounds.
Up then Down, Back and Forth.
Holding on so tight.
My hands, are they bleeding?
Excitement, he pushes me.
The speed and intensity build.
Joy, escalating with every breath.
The fresh air ~ whips ~ past my face.
Calming down,
with the delicate reassuring push.
Gradually,
I begin to slow down.
Slowly, Slowly,
with no more pushes,
until I stop.
He is no longer behind me.

Nichole Brady

The Death of an Era

Philip von Neupert

Against my better judgment, I did that last week. I do it all the time, really. For no reason that I can explain, I get the feeling that to go to a particular place or event would be a bad idea, then I go anyway.

This time it was a local summer fest. Nothing big, just a few food tents and a stage set out in a field. Mitch Ryder was playing that night, and I was looking forward to hearing him live. My girlfriend and I got there early, so I stuffed my face with food and waited for the band to start.

"Who is this guy?" my girlfriend asked. "You'll remember him when he starts playing," I said. "Bob Seager got started playing his tunes."

As it sometimes happens in late summer, it started to get chilly as the sun went down. Friday night at a small-town summer fest and the crowd was pretty thin to begin with, something I noticed with somewhat anxious curiosity. Mitch was pretty big once; I wondered where all his fans were tonight? It was beginning to get colder.

As with a lot of the old bands, I'd never seen them before, so I made a game of trying to guess who the band members were and whether or not they were original members or

replacements. I looked toward the stage and tried to pick Mitch out from among the people milling around setting up equipment. Is he the guy with the long hair? The one with the Ray-Bans? No, he looks too young...

After listening to a tape of some unknown band do a reggae version of "Sunshine of Your Love" for about an hour, the music stopped. A balding, middle aged man approached the mike and said, "Good evening everybody, my name is Mitch Ryder and I'm from Detroit." A strange feeling went through me as I thought, Is this guy really getting that old? I mean, he had all his big hits in the Sixties, but... Am I getting that old? What if he can't do it anymore? Will the crowd jeer and throw stuff at him? Will people jeer and throw stuff at me when I get that old?

Well, there he was, the embodiment of my youth. An icon from my "Wonder Years." For a minute I could smell my mom's apple pie and look through the window to see my dad washing the Buick in the driveway of our upper-middle class, All- American home. The flag fluttered in the summer breeze, the grass was green, and everybody was happy.

The vision was shattered when I looked over to see my girlfriend staring up at the stage with an expression that said, "Yeah, right. Who's this geezer?" So were a few other people. I started to get this queasy, horrified feeling in the pit of my stomach. It was kind of like watching the Hindenburg crashat Lakehurst. Oh, the humanity; Mitch was gonna go down in flames and take the dreams of my youth with him. It was now cold enough to see my breath.

Just as I was about to tell her to have a little respect

for the guy (and me), they started playing. Thank God, they weren't too bad. A couple of people got up and danced. After a while my girlfriend recognized one of their tunes and we got up and danced. Pretty soon there were about thirty people dancing on the plastic mat that they had laid down in front of the stage. Yes, it was beginning to look like everything would be all right.

But as I looked out from the "dance floor" at the bleachers, I could see the crowd walking away. Mitch could see it too. I wonder what he was thinking. I wonder if he could feel the pain and sadness of watching a legendary performer reduced to singing his heart and soul out for a couple dozen people dancing on a piece of plastic at a two-bit summer fest. It was sheer agony. I felt like crawling under a rock.

After a couple of hours of giving it their best, they decided to pack it in. They said good night, walked off the stage, and the few people who were left drifted away. I think that was the weirdest part, watching the great Mitch Ryder pack up his equipment alone, on a cold, dark night in a fly-speck Midwestern town.

As I drove home, I pondered the events of the evening. Well, after all these years I finally got to see Mitch Ryder, although bragging about it would probably get a response like, "Oh, really? He's still alive?" I don't care what people say, I still dig his music. But even though I thought he was great, I couldn't shake the hollow feeling the night had left me with. It was as if I had just seen a ghost.

Economy

As a child I dreamt recurrently
that I stood on a deserted road going
over a low hill surrounded by other hills.
A chalky moon shone now and then through
the eddying flocks of woolly black clouds, the wind
whipping and howling between the hills.
In my hand I held a wad of dollar bills.
One by one the wind ripped them from my palm
and blasted off for miles with each.
A constricting sense of anxiety seized
me as the money disappeared. I stopped dreaming the
dream when, in the dream, that anxiety
was replaced by a kind of excited nonchalance
that still sometimes comes over me when I spend.

Dieter Zeschke

"Mirage" Las Vagas, NV
Betsy Zibas

Undecided?

Why are you such a good liar, or are you just a good deceiver?
And why am I so disillusioned to be your hopeful believer?
And why do we do it? And are we just blind?
So is "Love's Sweet Confusion" really just losing your mind?
And if this is my normality, then I guess I am insane.
And if this is my reality, well, then I guess I am to blame.
Now when it hurts to cry is it because we conjure up the memory,
Or is it just our dreams being watered down by reality?
And when you told me I was special did you mean only for then?
And if I didn't love you would it make this pain pretend?
My memory can't forget you my heart just won't say goodbye,
and is it because they really can't, or that they just aren't willing to try?

Kathryn Polemikos

After Rain

Two days' rain
mean as staples, slant in the eyes.
Now a bright wind
braids it in chevrons, combs it in curls
down the supple back of the river.
Just here
a frill of freshwater ruffles the satin,
lace on a long gleaming gown.
I think it is what knows
the rot and slime and twist
of the black bed,
what laughs,
what curves the smile,
what dimples the quiet mouth,
tender, slow.

Judith Cordary

GUILTY OF ENGINEERING

Moriah Caliendo

In the seventh grade, I began my life of crime by blowing up my locker. Actually, I didn't really blow it up; it was more like I blew it open. To be really honest, I didn't think it was as wrong as everyone seemed to think it was since it would put an end to the long string of tardies that I had accumulated as a result of me not being able to get the thing open and get my materials within the alotted four minutes between classes. It was a miserably hot and humid September day and I being stubborn and impatient as always, was feeling rushed on my way to my Earth Science class at the other end of the building. My locker loomed ominously, as it had proven to be a source of great stress in the bustling corridor of the junior high. THe locker was inanimate, as I now realize, but at that moment I was thoroughly convinced that it had some sort of personal vnedetta against me. As I approached, it seemed the green metal cavern was taunting me. This day, however, I was prepared for the evil of the malicious locker.

Without pestering with the clumsy lock, which undoubtedly would not open, I smacked the door just above the combination dial with my open palm. I stepped back quickly, feeling the sharp sting of the steel in my hand and expecting more of a violent explosion. The small device that I had my brother (who was quite mechanical for a fourth

grader) formulate merely made a "Pop" and the door swung open, clanging against the locker behind it. There was hardly any evidence of any kind of explosion apart from a black burnt-looking scar along the lock side edge of the door, the sour, guilty small of sulfur and smoke and a ringing in my ears.

The door refused to stay shut after I had collected my materials from the rubblle of textbooks, mangled folders and old papers that had littered my locker prior to the explosion. (I never could figure out how all the other girls kept their lockers tidy and organized and still never got a tardy.) I merely propped the door shut the best I could and ran to the Earth Science class. (I still got a tardy.)

Later that day, I was paged to the dean's office. Having forgotten the locker ordeal altogether, I bounded in expecting the lunch money I had forgotten in my rush earlier that morning to be waiting for me. Not finding it, my expression must have become confused. The ancient and crabby dean then escroted me firmly to my locker with his claw of a hand gripping my shoulder. He rattled off some garbled old-man speech about destruction and what it meant in the school setting. He then marched me back to his of fice where he called my mother to let her know that I would not be permitted to return to school for the remainder of the term.

At this time I became aware that my ingenuitive solution to a relatively simple problem was apparently not appropriate in the context of a school setting. My expulsion in the seventh grade taught me social discretion at the cost only of my present and eternal status as a model student (what model student gets expelled?), the integrity of my poor locker, and my own mother's sanity.

"Space Kitsch"
S. Wells

A Private Dance

I put your latest lie in my pack
and head out
toward evening, the light
golden and sure.
In this high place
I can turn
pure north, pure south, pure east and west,
all purities between.

You're heavy.
If you were a child
slung by a strap around my forehead,
you would be borne bleeding by now.

We go west
toward one long ridge
who sleeps on her side,
her tender grass folded in shadow,
but shoulder, hip,
the line of her exquisite head
still gold.

Stone on my back, in my throat,
you urge me down.
But seven little trees, filigreed in light,
spring from her crown,
a diadem, a long, fine earring,
a private dance.

In silence
I watch them soften to gray.
We turn north,
under the first star.

Judith Cordary

LOST

Amongst familiar trees.
Amongst the fairies and nymphs
Held by the
keeper who now lets go.
I thought I knew myself
The child of the moon.
The lover of songs and stories.
Now bewildered by my present
state of mind.

Nichole Brady

Good-bye

There is hope buried even in utter
hopelessness and freedom bound even
to utter determination. I knew
a little girl, sixteen years
old, who said that by the time
she had grown old enough to die,
"they" would already have discovered
a cure for death. I have no reason
to doubt that she believed this.
People, as though you might have
me all to yourselves, do not
take my disaster away from me.
I know that it is all I have.

Dieter Zeschke

Rock Valley College - ERC

"Untitled"
Lisa Fichtner

LIKE MOTHER, LIKE ME

Michelle Barnett

Living without Joe taught me about silence and the tricks it plays. Silence is rarely silent, but a tangled web of sounds: creaks and whispers, voices and echoes and footsteps. When I first heard a kitten crying, I wondered if the sound was in my mind, some strange pulse through my brain. When the crying didn't stop, I put down the book I was reading. I tore up a slice of bologna and threw it on my front step. I watched out the window. The kitten wore a collar, so I knew it wasn't a stray. I wanted to go out and hold it, but let it be. I didn't want to teach it to trust people.

The kitten's cries reminded me of the year I started second grade. Our cat gave birth late in the fall, after the first frost. We still lived in the old farm house, none of the plaster walls straight and floor boards creaking under our feet in every room. My mother put Koko and her kittens in a cardboard box, which she lined with one of my father's flannel shirts. She set the box at the top of the stairs, right outside my bedroom.

The smallest kitten didn't get milk and mewed pitifully in a corner of the box, keeping me awake at night. My mother also heard the soft, tiny mews even though she slept downstairs. The staircase moaned

under her bare feet at night when she came up with warm milk in one of my doll bottles. She fed the kitten, holding it close, whispering to it, petting it. If I got out of bed, rubbing my eyes in the light, she told me we must take care of the kitten so it wouldn't be an orphan.

We forgot to name the kitten before it died, four days old. We buried it, adding our tears to the brown November grass. "It never even opened its eyes," my mother said, turning over the cold, black dirt with the garden shovel.

At my mother's burial two months later, I hid my face in the warmth of my father's gray wool coat, but I still thought of that coldness and blackness. Her car had skidded on ice and gone off the road, hitting a tree. Her seat belt was on, her body broken. The groceries were strewn around
the car, scattered across the snow like confetti.

In the spring I looked for the kitten, digging where I thought we buried it. I wanted a bone, a tooth, a patch of fur, something to hold or put under my pillow and remember. I only found beetles and slippery, slick earth worms.

The one time I went to my mother's grave, I tried to believe she lay beneath the grass, but couldn't. I beat the ground with my fist, more angry than sad, knowing I'd never find her.

I began missing my mother after Joe left. I came home from waiting tables and found him naked in bed with a woman, eating powdered sugar doughnuts. Their lips were parted and white. I stood in the

bedroom doorway, touching my hair, full of grease and smoke from the diner. I pulled at my green waitress uniform, the waistband tight and pinching. For all her frantic grasping at my white sheet, the woman kept precious few secrets about her thin, brown body.

I went to the living room and loosened my shoes. In an hour, Joe had packed his clothes in garbage bags. I sat on the couch, stared into his full ash tray on the coffee table, made patterns in the ashes with the tip of a half-smoked cigarette. She waited in his truck.

Every time Joe walked through the living room, bags in both hands, he looked at me, but I didn't let him see me looking back. He seemed angry and I thought he was going to start yelling my name, like a child who won't be ignored
in a grocery store. But he only threw silent questions, which hit me like small stones: Don't you care? Aren't you going to try to stop me? I let them fall to the floor, unacknowledged. Carrying the last bags, he waited at the door. I kept my eyes on the carpet.

"Keep the couch," Joe said.

"I don't want it."

"I know," he said, the door open. "You never wanted anything from me. You won't even look at me. You just sit there, cold as they come."

When the door shut, I wanted to feel angry, I wanted to cry, but I felt numb. I thought about washing the sheets, about putting my arms around a pillow. I wished for dreamless sleep, but fell into a trance on the couch and couldn't move.

All at once, I thought I felt my mother in the room, still and cold as a stone, watching me. I longed to talk to her, hear her voice, but she wouldn't speak.

I began gathering tattered memories of my mother, tried to piece the scraps together like a patchwork quilt. I went through back-and-white photos and found rare ones of her holding me. I looked at her high school year book, learned that her hair was dyed blonde during her senior year and that she played the violin. I read the messages, sensed a distance between her and the others. I called her best friend from

When I met Cathy at a cafe for lunch, she was thinner than at the funeral fourteen years ago. Her fair skin was baked golden and lines were beginning to show in the corners of her eyes. She wore a white shirt with long, billowing sleeves. Small red flowers were embroidered at the neckline, a detail I thought my mother would like.

"How are you doing?" She leaned forward, elbows on the starched white table cloth. Over the phone, I had told her about Joe.

"Fine," I said. "Good, really. I've just been thinking about her a lot. More than before. I have too much time." I didn't mention that while I was eating cereal that morning, I imagined my mother sitting across from me, her eyes down, as if she were sad, as if she saw her reflection in the table top.

We ate chef's salads, and Cathy picked out rings of red onion with her fork. A pair of gold bracelets jangled on her wrist.

"Do you know about the baby?" she asked.

My hand lifted a glass of water. My heart jumped in my chest. My sister was born to me with a rush of cold water.

My hand lifted a glass of water. My heart jumped in my chest. My sister was born to me with a rush of cold water down my throat. I gulped, choked, almost cried, almost drowned.

I caught my breath, but have forgotten what else Cathy talked about. I didn't finish my salad. I slowly sipped water, the ice cubes clinking against the glass, my insides quivering. I appeared calm, but I was barely able to sit still at the table. I wanted to jump up, run in the street.

When I got home, I went over the rooms with a fine tooth comb. I threw out all of Joe's full ash trays, his coffee-stained mugs, the glass bottles of cologne he had left in the medicine cabinet, his black vinyl foot stool with the stuffing coming out of it. I moved furniture, vacuumed, dusted, swept. I shoved his zebra-patterned couch out the front door and planned to let it sit in the grass and rot. When I finished, there was no trace of him, not a crumb, a fleck, or a strand of blonde hair.

An ocean of hope leaked into my heart, one drop at a time. By the end of the day, I felt full and happy. I tried to imagine my sister: the sound of her voice, the smell of her hair, the shape of her face. Noise and color flitted in my mind like a carnival: laughter, green powder on an eye lid, a flash of cheek bone. I tossed around in bed, thinking I would never fall asleep.

When my head finally emptied and my body became light, my sister took my hand. Our fingers

entwined, felt natural together. Our hands are like my mother's. Youthful and small, they fit into a man's hand like a girl's. The skin is tight over the bones, unmarked by time, white and smooth as blank pages.

Married and remarried since my mother died, my father has said the accident was her fault because she was hurrying home with the groceries. He talked like this when his new wife was in the room, as if he was trying to prove his love for my mother was dead. I put off calling him until I became restless to begin my search for my sister. I knew the most logical place to start would be with him.

"Yes," he said over the phone. "She lived with a Scott-somebody before I met her. I don't remember his last name. I didn't know him."

"What about the baby?"

"She never talked to me about it. But it makes sense."

"What do you mean?"

My father paused. "The whole time I knew her, she was never happy in the spring. I'd shake off the winter blahs by March, but Merilyn stayed sad, even on those first warm days when the snow melts. By April, she'd be crying most mornings. It wouldn't lift until summer started. I never understood, but it makes sense."

Florida's orange groves, wildlife, sunsets, and white sand beaches. The occasional tourist trap. My father's way of both keeping in touch with me and avoiding me.

I forgot to tell him about Joe. If I didn't say

anything, my father wouldn't ask, wouldn't suspect anything until Christmas dinner, when Joe didn't come to the table. Poor Sally would have one less china plate to wash, but a big heap of mashed potatoes to put away.

After talking with my father, my hand reached for the phone book. I searched the yellow pages for detectives. I couldn't afford one, but I felt my mother pushing me on. I saw a small ad in the corner of the page. "No payment unless we succeed."

"Call them," my mother's voice said. I began to remember the sound of it.

Without thinking, I picked up the phone. My fingers pushed the buttons as if they already knew the number.

At the diner, I talked about my sister to customers who listened. I felt my throat open up, found my voice. I mentioned my sister while I refilled coffee cups. I didn't confine myself to what I knew, since that was only a two-minute conversation. I tried to draw it out, stretch my story, make it last. We sold bottomless cups of coffee, and I didn't want my life to be anything less.

Without blinking, I looked into a woman's eyes and said that my sister and I were identical twins separated at birth. She mentioned a show she'd seen about twins in the womb and how they form a bond. Even before two months, they touch each other, hold hands, even seem to kiss. I thought about gripping my sister's watery fingers, kissing her translucent cheek, and felt loved.

Talking about my sister gave shape and sub-

stance to her shadow, put flesh over her bones, a thought in her eyes, a tint in her cheeks. She became partly real. I had more energy at work, and fell asleep easily when I got home.

Many customers, no matter how lonely they seemed, turned inward as I talked. Something changed in their faces. A curtain came down, a wall was built. But every night, I met at least someone who appreciated my need to create my sister, to gently stir what embers I had, to draw out a breath or two of smoke. Rarely, I asked for advice about how to find her.

"Do you know where she was born?" a woman asked, spooning grapefruit into her mouth. "If you do, hospitals keep records," she said, nodding her head.

Over the phone, the woman's voice was a monotone, so efficient that I couldn't see her wearing any color but gray. I hung up after five minutes of her not telling me anything.

In the silence, I heard my mother's voice. "Try going there," it said. "Wear something better than jeans to let her know you mean business. Maybe she'll talk to you then."

I wore a light green sun dress and white sandals that hadn't been broken in so they hurt my feet. With work, I couldn't afford a blister, but I convinced myself that I wouldn't be walking much. I braided my hair.

Driving to the hospital, I thought of my sister. I knew her hands, but not her name. I believed she had long, dark hair like my mother and me. Glancing

into the rearview mirror, I saw a flash of my green eyes and decided that hers were the same.

The woman worked in Medical Records, a cramped cubicle in the back of a room. She wasn't wearing gray, but a red sweater buttoned up over a white blouse. It was July, but the air conditioning worked overtime in this woman's corner, and I rubbed my upper arms, trying to get warm. The only information I got was the woman's first name. She didn't look at me, only stared at her computer screen, and the green light glowed on her face.

"I can tell you dates when the patient was admitted," she said. "I can't tell you if she was admitted to have a baby or not."

A date slipped out of her mouth like a piece of paper flying out of a folder: April 18, 1972. Possibly my sister's birthday, maybe the day a nurse lifted my sister out of my mother's arms and out of my life.

I waited before asking for more. When I finally did ask, Jody leaned over her desk, looked at me with pretty blue eyes under too many layers of make-up. She said the adoption records were closed to me by state law.

"You need a court order."

"Can I get one?" I asked.

"You need special circumstances."

"I just want to find my sister."

"You won't get one then." Jody met my eyes. "But you can try if you want."

In the hallway, I studied the faces of strangers passing by, especially dark-haired, green-eyed women who looked a bit older than me. I recognized a curve in a lip, the arc of a brow, the

rounded corner of a jaw, such small things that added up to nothing.

On a crowded elevator going down, I felt alone. I closed my eyes. I had no voice, no name, no shape. I didn't breathe. I didn't need air. I thought I felt the blood stop moving in my veins. I was one in a family of ghost women. When the elevator doors opened to the lobby, I felt wakened from a deep sleep. My feet carried me to my car. My car seemed to drive itself home.

As a child I picked dandelions in the spring, making bouquets that my mother wouldn't let me bring into the house. I rubbed the flowers on my skin, pretending they were powder puffs, and they'd leave yellow smudges. I popped off the heads into a butter dish and pretended I was making soup. One morning for an hour, on Mother's Day, I picked dozens of the biggest, most yellow dandelions in our yard, as many as I could hold in my hands. By noon, I thought, my mother would love dandelions, too.

Picking and smashing bugs off the flowers, I waited outside their bedroom for my mother to come out. I watched the knob turn, the door open. I gulped air when I saw my mother finally standing in the doorway. I threw the flowers up and shouted that she was the best mother in the world.

Rather than taking me into her arms as I expected, my mother didn't move for a minute. She pulled her robe tightly closed. Her face turned sad, and she went back into the bedroom.

"Clean up that mess," I heard from the other side of the door.

I thought she was angry with me. Confused, I

gathered the flowers. Somehow, in trying to make her happy, I had almost made my mother cry. I saw it in her face, heard how she sucked her breath in, noticed how her eyes became red before she turned and went back to her room. When I found out about my lost sister, I began to understand.

The Sunday morning Joe came by, sunlight poured in through the kitchen windows and showed all the dust floating in the air. Before speaking, he took the biggest orange from the wooden bowl on the table and started peeling. He sectioned the orange and put a piece in front of me.

"Forgot to leave something," he said. He took his key to the trailer off his key ring. He set it down on the table, moved it toward me with a finger.

He reached for another orange, started peeling, and I knew he wasn't ready to leave.

"Eat it," he said, pointing to the section he'd given me. "Very sweet."

I put some in my mouth and bit down. The juice ran, warm and good. I reached for my own orange so he would quit offering me sections.

"I didn't know you were just going to toss the couch outside," he said.

"I told you I didn't want it."

We met eyes for the first time since I caught him in bed with the woman and the doughnuts. He half smiled and then looked away.

"I want you to take it with you, since you have your truck. It got soaked in the rain and I'm tired of breathing in the smell of it every time I go out."

"That's your fault," he said, grabbing another

orange.

I took the orange out of his hand. "Stop." I set the orange back in the bowl.

"What?"

"They're mine."

"Do you miss me?" he asked.

"I've got my sister now."

He just looked at me, his left eye twitching like it always did when he was confused or nervous. I didn't explain. He slumped down in his chair.

"Guess where Sherri is," he said.

"The blonde with the doughnuts?" I tried not to think of her thin, brown body, the gold anklet glinting above her foot.

He nodded. "Guess where she is."

I watched his face.

"She's in church," he said, smiling at the irony. "She feels bad about what happened. She hadn't been to church since she was a kid, but she's been going every Sunday since that happened."

"You should go with her instead of coming here," I said. "You belong with her, not me."

"I don't belong in church," Joe said.

"Couldn't hurt."

"We're getting married. She's having a baby."

"Good for you," I said, tough as twine. I stood up, opened the door. "I want you to go."

When Joe left this time, he was the one with his eyes on the floor. I shut the door, slid my back down it, sat on the carpet. I didn't feel anything when I heard his work boots slam down the front steps. After I heard his truck start up, I held onto my knees and missed my mother. It stung, thinking of

Joe having a family when I only had my ghosts and shadows. "Don't cry," my mother's voice said, but I couldn't stop.

I stared at the phone for a long time after talking with Mr. Timmons from the locator service. He said there were two local adoption agencies around the time my sister was born. One still operated in the red brick building by the post office. The other burned down several years ago and all records were lost. Since there were no local files on my sister, he thought they were burned in the fire.

"I don't usually give up after only a month, but it's a dead end," he said. "There's no charge. We only charge when we can help."

There was an abrupt click and then the dial tone. The sounds of a phone so intimate and close to your ear always make things seem final.

I fell into a slump at work, became tired with four hours still left on my shift. I didn't talk, just nodded when a lonely man talked about how we've been getting too much rain. I poured his fourth cup of coffee, watched a woman's hands as she sectioned a half-grapefruit with a spoon.

"Any luck finding your sister?" she asked.

I looked into her face, but didn't recognize her at first. When she took off her reading glasses and smiled, I remembered that she suggested calling hospitals.

"I'm afraid not," I said.

"I was thinking of you," she said. Her blue eyes were kind and soothing. "I need to say something, but I don't know how." She frowned.

"More advice?" I asked.

"Kind of." She took a breath. "You're a nice, young woman. Your mother is proud of you, I bet."

"My mother is —"

"I know, I know. She's still proud." She sipped her coffee. I had an order up, but I waited.

"Your sister may not be able to help you, even if you find her," she said.

"Just a minute," I said, laying her check face-down.

I turned and grabbed the two orders. I didn't want the eggs to go cold. My mind whirled with what the woman said and I forgot who was scrambled and who was fried. I also had to run for ketchup.

By the time I got back to the woman's booth, she was gone. I picked up the quarters she left under the napkin. I felt cheated. Maybe she could've told me something I needed to know.

I knew that I was losing weight. I didn't have a scale, but my waitress uniform had gotten baggy. It pinched less at the waist and didn't dig in when I sat down. I held my hair back, looked into the mirror and touched my face, pressed the skin over my cheek bones. I wasn't thin, but since Joe had left, I'd lost my baby fat. I thought of the thin woman getting fat with Joe's baby and smiled.

Getting ready for work, I put on more make-up than usual. I rubbed in foundation, which I hadn't used for close to a year. I quit wearing make-up so fewer truckers would hit on me at the diner. Why I was loading a brush with Misty Pink blush, I didn't know.

I reached for my mascara and saw my sister's face looking at me from the mirror. She wore more make-up than me and slicked her hair back with gel. I saw the beauty mark by her eye and thought that hers was more glamorous than mine, more like a movie star's.

"This is looking a lot better," she said.

She touched my cheek with one of her fingers, so softly it almost felt like a kiss. "Eyelash." She held it on her finger tip. "Make a wish."

She warned me about blinking. She blew on my lashes to help them dry. The make-up was too much for me, but I left it.

"You're getting skinny," she said before fading away. I loved her, but she wouldn't even tell me her name. For the first time, I wondered if I would ever know anything about her.

I leaned close to the bathroom mirror and exhaled. My breath fogged the glass. After tightenelt on my uniform, I left for work. In the car, it felt like I wasn't alone. I turned and looked in the back seat, half expecing the bting to see someone.

"What is she like?" I wondered out loud.

"I don't know," my mother's voice said. "Probably a lot like us."

"I'll never find her," I said and waited. I rubbed my lips together, smooth with lipstick.

The voice didn't answer, didn't speak again. I concentrated, listened so hard that the silence buzzed in my ears. I almost didn't hear the small, soft crying behind me before my mother became silent.

"Untitled"
Anthony Natale

Mice

An irrational fear
of rodents freezes me.
Seeing a mouse gallop
under the door into
the room is like hosting
someone else's thought.

Once, I stomped
one. An irrational fear
of someone else's thoughts
just might someday find
me flat beneath such
a shadow's shrinking crush.

Dieter Zeschke

Messages from Above

Yanked unsuspecting out of a pleasant tub
of bubbles
on Sunday afternoon by
door chimes
I don an ever-stylish t-shirt, threadbare, and barely
covering my body
a bath towel and
dripping hair
To answer to you?
(I thought you were the landlords,
arriving to complain again about my noises.)
A "God salesman" instead who won't
take "No" for an answer,
pushing his faith on me, past me,
over me
into my living room and
I can't stop it (I tried!)
as he begins to worry me.
Will I suffer for this impatience
Someday?
But then he begins to rape me
with his words
forcing them on me in spite
of my protest.
I need
so desperately to escape
back to my tub!
My words won't come, only
silence
which he takes to mean proceed.
My stomach churns,
anxious
and suddenly I am rescued by a
Holy Sign
from my gods.
I puked on him.
He left, but forgot his hat in his hurry.
I went back to my tub.

Moriah Caliendo

Obsess

For what is wanted
and when wanting has,
becomes unwanted.
Desire requires
with thirst for wine
that fuels desir'd thirst
and quenched is not by resolution
nor by completed exploitation.

Benjamin Nelson

He Read My Soul

Heather Newlands

As the crowd carried me along in an open market in Old Delhi, I knew I had never felt more alive. Excitement and anxiety tingled through my body until I felt like a sponge sucking up all the unusual things surrounding me. Little did I realize that by the end of the day I would have partaken of one of the most incredible experiences I have ever encountered.

It was one of my first days in India and I felt completely transplanted. I had never before experienced such a place of extremes. It was exhausting to have my five senses attacked all at once, all the time. My nose worked overtime as it sniffed the wonderful incense that each merchant burned trying unsuccessfully to mask the stench of sewage. As I passed each crowded stand, the incredibly diversified smells of food wafted around me along with the smoke from small dung fires. The babble of an unknown language, the lowing of the sacred cows and the din of congested traffic grabbed at my ears.

Obvious poverty and filth surrounded me everywhere and yet incredible beauty did also as brightly coloured saris glided by me with big black eyes. Big black eyes regarded me from everywhere and watched my every move. Eyes watched me as the spices and flavours of a samosa exploded in my mouth like firecrackers. Eyes gazed in vacant non-comprehension as I haltingly attempted to

speak their language, only to have a singsong voice float back to me from the depths of a turban,"I no be speaking anglis!" Still other eyes peaked shyly before demurely lowering or hiding behind a scarf. I especially remember the depth in the steady quiet gaze of the sadhu.

I had read briefly of the holy men of India and really never thought that I'd come face to face with one. In the midst of the chaos of everyday life, there he stood. He was white from his uncovered head to his bare toes that poked out from beneath a glistening white robe. The haze created from the baking sun only heightened the apparition before me. Like a dream, the old man glided towards me in slow motion. I panicked. I had just read about the Suffis and the power they had to reach into the depths of your mind making you subservient. Should I run?

But they could reach your mind anywhere. So, my only option was to be strong and keep him out of my mind! How silly to be thinking like this, especially when he was probably just a poor old man. But his eyes entranced me so.

I couldn't look away from those gentle all-seeing eyes. They held me to him closer than any tangible bond could. They were so old that I truly felt I was looking into a well that held all the secrets of mankind.

An overwhelming calmness swept over me when he gently touched my hands. Any cares or troublesome thoughts vanished from my mind leaving instead a total peace. In that instant life seemed so simplistically real.

Before he spoke, I knew he could feel my

thoughts. Speaking in a lilting soft voice he told me that I had a powerful mind and proceeded to tell me my life's history. I was flabbergasted. I immediately deduced that there was a trick to this. However, he continued to put my conscious thoughts into words and even though I knew I should panic, I still felt the calming effect of his hands and eyes.

Slowly, the outside world invaded our tete a tete. I will always remember his parting words. He told me to never stop feeling the world around, for if you do, then you truly are not alive. I have found them to be wise words that changed my outlook forever. Even though this meeting lasted a very short time, I will always remember a special moment in time when I communed with a sadhu whose eyes read my soul.

"Market"
Photo by Heather Newlands

"Arboreal Mind"
Fiber Design
Eric Schaefer

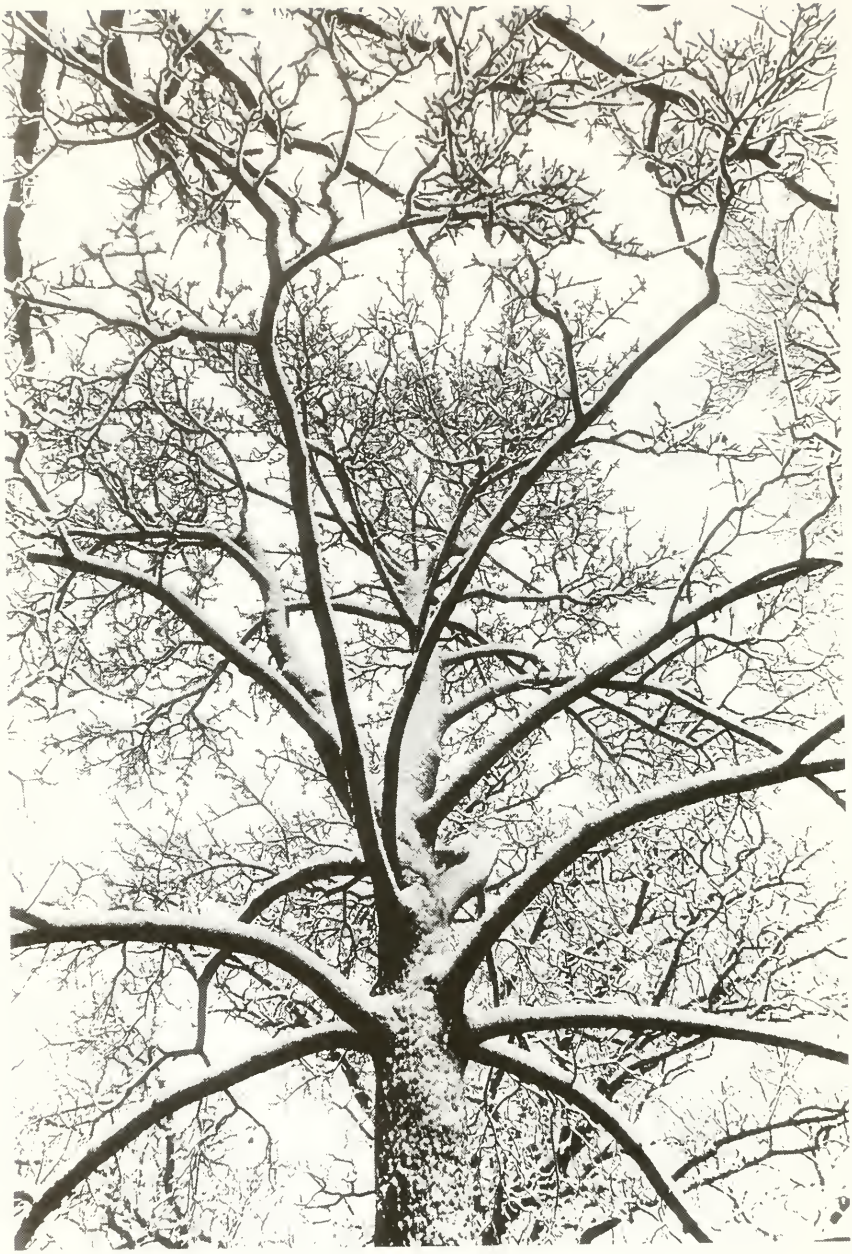


Photo by Judith Cordary

Thunk

A ball I am, rolling
downhill, against the grain;
A bathtub I am, going
down its own drain.

Dieter Zeschke

( )

Somtimes I sit back
and wonder how it can be
that this world I see.
I'm turned inside out
and looking from here, I fear
that it's just me I see.
I reach for
but all things true become a lie
when spoken into air
so clean and pure,
it chokes the life I gasped in pain,
and hopeless jest
became a truth
as good as any other
I had found.

Benjamin Nelson

First Run

Mike Papp

I started on my current path about 5 years ago. The millennium was just around the corner. I had just begun to attend school at a small state-run campus in a place country folk would call a city and city dwellers would call a town. A small city, built more out than up, the tallest building was only eighteen stories and it didn't have a lot of competition in that department. It was while I was there that all of the advances in computer technology led to the Virtual Reality User Interface that swept the country like wildfire. Or a virulent plague, depending on your point of view. Anyway, when I started school, we were all still using DOS and Windows. Mostly Windows98.

I met a man there who goes by the tag 'Anarchy' (real name George) and he was a runner even then. You would have called him a hacker. I, actually, was the hacker. Or, at least, I was trying to be one. That first try of mine almost ended my scholastic career. I was in one of the computer labs, alone except for one other student. A young guy who seemed very intent on his assignment. I did not expect him to come wandering my way looking for help or sympathy. Many students, as you may know, often enjoy commiserating over assignments unfinished or late. Having just gotten to the lab myself, my screen was still blank, displaying only that dull black that seems to me to be hiding something unknown. Deciding to postpone my composition assignment, I chose to attempt to

uncover the mystery that I perceived lay beyond the dull black veil I faced.

I had never tried hacking into a computer system before, but, I did know my way around the operating system pretty well. I had used computers now for a few years and I am a moderately intelligent person at the very least. Booting up the deck I was at, I got into the setup screen and tried to change the password so that I could access the administrative menu. I must have tripped some sort of red flag in the system because the lab locked down. The door sealed with an audible click and we were stuck until a lab tech came and saw what was what. Before the tech got there, the other student left his seat, muttering under his breath, and came over to my workstation. He fiddled with my machine for a minute before returning to his own deck.

Then the tech came in followed by a rather bored looking security guard. Looking at my machine only revealed an essay titled "An Analysis of T.S. Elliot's 'The Wadeland'" and not the system setup menu that I had been looking at just moments ago When the tech left, cursing under his breath, and took the sleepy eyed security guard with him, My fellow student and I were alone again. Now, we hadn't said one word to each other yet, so I opened my mouth to thank him for saving my butt. Before I could make a sound, though, he said, crossly, Amateurs! Before you play, you had better learn the rules! He then grabbed his things and stormed out, leaving me in stunned silence.

It wasn't until a few days later that I heard form my strange benefactor and found out that he goes by the name Anarchy. It's his tag line whenever he is pulling a prank online or hacking into somebody's computer sys-

tem. He likes to be recognized for his work and has attained a fair amount of infamy in the area. His message was brief and told me that if I really wanted to be as good as him in unauthorized computer usage I should take classes that would help me towards that goal. He also sent along a copy of my new schedule. A schedule that he revised for me in the college's mainframe. It was loaded with classes in computers and electronics. So I took the classes. It changed my life.

As I went through school, Anarchy would send me e-mail Tips and hints and suggestions at first, then came the challenges. He would dare me to hack into different systems and do little things. These challenges always required me to use my head and be creative as well as logical. They steadily grew in difficulty but I always managed to succeed while keeping out of trouble. Now I was into the illegal stuff. I was so giddy with all of the knowledge I gained and the power I felt that I had, that I never gave any thought to being a criminal. I mean, I hadn't redly done anything yet. Nothing that hurt anyone or caused a lot of trouble.

Then came graduation and with it a message to meet with Anarchy in person, something that we had never done since that first eventful evening. So, in a nondescript little apartment, my training began in earnest. Anarchy had set up some serious hardware and had me making simulated runs against various set-ups of countermeasures. This is when I began to use the VR interface. It had been around for a year or so now. You could say that the school I attended was a long way from ground zero of the technological explosion. I performed flawlessly and Anarchy soon mentioned to me this big job he had contracted to do. He was supposed to make a

run on some big company's system and retrieve some very sensitive files. The run wouldn't be anything complicated and he wanted me to give it a try. My first run! He warned me not to get too excited, for he had seen others get overconfident and make stupid mistakes.

Not to worry, I said, I will keep my mind sharp and clear.

Just in case something did go wrong, he had a plan for escape. You see, if I screwed up, we would be traced very quickly and would receive a visit from the cops. If the corporate security people didn't get there first.

Anarchy assured me that cops would be a lot easier on us but that the corporate goons would act more quickly to protect their interests. He had cut into the apartment next door through the closet in the front room. All the apartments have the same layout arranged around the building's center. So, our closet shares its back wall with the back of the closet in the adjacent apartment. He was very meticulous in doing this and took care to keep the hatch from being easily discovered. Apparently the guy that lived next door worked the late shift and was unlikely to be there if we needed to leave through his front door. A bold litth plan for our escape if one was needed. That's the way Anarchy likes to operate, with a lot of flair and drama.

Feeling well prepared, I donned the VR gear and jacked into the net. I cruised over to the corporate sector and found our target. As I hit the gateway to their site, I found my first obstacle. Looming in front of me and appearing to fade off into the distance to either side was a lightly glowing matrix with constant streams of binary digits racing across its surface. A code wall, the

new version of a user password, uses a random coding scheme that would need to match up with the user's computer. It is assumed that only legitimate users will have the correct codes used to initiate the scheme on their hard drives. Instead, I have a program that will translate a section of binary digits into hexadecimal notation and bounce that back at the wall. This will get me into the system, although any security measures I encounter later will not recognize me as an authorized user. You can't have it all. Anything else that pops up will have to be dealt with separately.

Tendrils of light extend from my hands and overlay themselves on a section of the wall. They pulse in time to the changing numbers. When they turn red I launch myself through the wall. I love VR, even though it's really just all bells and whistles made to keep people from seeing the underlying program code. I wonder what new changes the future holds. You think you've seen the most life has to offer and then someone puts a whole new twist on something. Oops, better keep my mind on business.

The second obetacle came up before I even reached the company's internal network. This one has quite a different look than the code wall. Before me now are hundreds of shifting strands of web with tiny clockwork spiders scuttling back and forth amongst them. This is a two-fold trap. Touching the webs themselves will alert the network security of an intruder (me in this case). The spiders will then attach to my VR representation and begin to trace my signal. If I was an authorized user, I would be carrying some code that would cause the webs to part so that I could pass easily and unmolested. It won't be much harder for me this way though.

I have brought a virus program that will give me the time I need to negotiate the webs. You see, the other part of the trap exists to catch the casual hacker unaware. As the webs shift about the netspace, a small opening will briefly appear. If you didn't know better, you might think it was an opening you could race through. You would find out you were wrong as the webs quickly shift again, snaring you in their midst and alerting security of your attempted trespass. Yet, it is this very opening that I will use to get past the barrier.

I call up a small spray bottle from my arsenal and wait for the opening to appear. This is the representation of my little virus. As the webs shift again I let forth a spray of fine mist. The mist settles over everything in front of me, freezing it into place temporardy. This will give me just enough time to make it through before the virus burns out, leaving the system functioning normally. It all looks very Christmas like, sort of a tinsel and lights scene with the little frozen spiders as bizarre ornaments. Not exactly a white Christmas, but then again, I'm not being a very good boy.

Out the other side of the webs and it looks like I am in the clear. Sprawled before me is the company's network, laid out like a cluster of office buildings that you would see in the physical world. I wonder if the site is modeled on their real office complex. Along with the occasional avatar of some corporate flunky working late, there are the watchdogs patrolling the pathways between the 'buildings.' These are another security measure used to detect people like me that make it through the outer defenses as well as to sniff out unauthorized data flows. In order to keep any from coming up to me for a 'sniff,' I fire off several bolts of random

noise. This will keep them chasing bad data long enough for me to find what I came for and get back out. I hope.

Circling around the complex, I look for that which would attract the least attention, and almost immediately find a likely candidate. It looks like a very solid little building and has the title, Bills of Lading, displayed quite prominently on the front. What attracted my attention, though, was the small unmarked door tucked into an alcove on the backside of the building. It looks like they are hiding the good stuff in a mountain of paperwork. Seeing no obvious security measures on my approach (they would only attract attention to this point anyway), I zip right on up to the door. A mundane looking door complete with doorknob and lock, it would most likely stymie all but the professional runners. I may not be one yet, but I certainly have one for a mentor, so this should also be easy to bypass.

I pop up an amorphous blob of goo and stuff it into the keyhole. It is a program that reconstructs bits of data into whole pieces of input. It tries to reassemble the passwords used on this type of lock-out program. Success largely depends on how frequently this part of the system is accessed. Due to the hot nature of the files I am after, I assume that it is a project in the works which would mean access many times a day. Twice a day, at the very least, if only the project loader has actual access. When my helper has the info it needs, the goo will seem to harden into the shape of whatever key fits the lock. Six clock ticks later the goo hardens and I give the door a gentle push.

The space inside reminds me of my college dorm. Featureless and dull. Except for the imposing

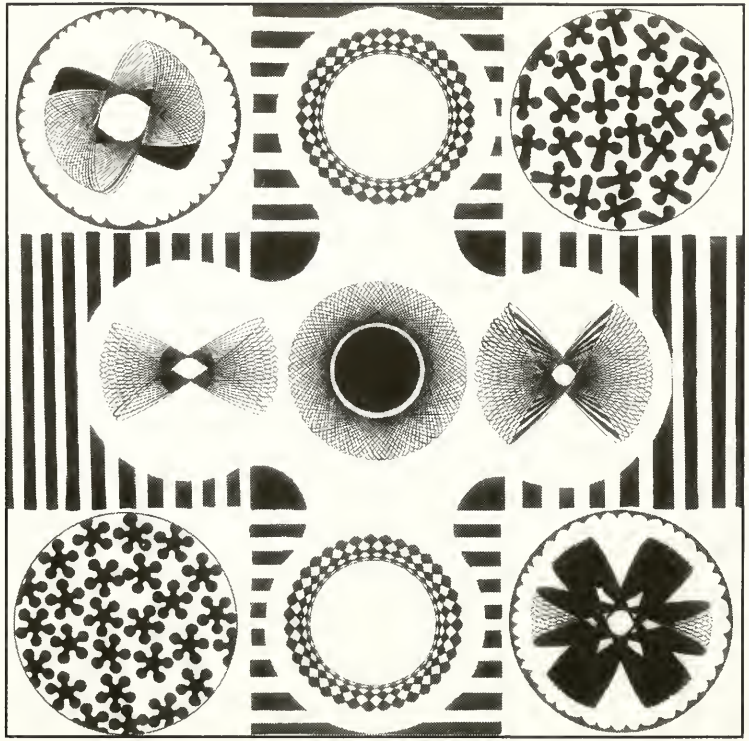
bank vault style door that takes up most of the opposite wall. Of course there are programs that will crack this puppy open too. I won't need one right now because Anarchy supplied me with the codes to get inside. One was a really long alphanumeric string and the other was some old riddle about an egg. Whatever it takes I suppose. I wonder if he did some scouting here before sending me in, or if our client is a disgruntled employee? I suppose it doesn't matter. I just need to grab the files and erase them from the site. Then back out and home I go.

As the door slowly rises, I take a peek back over my shoulder to see if anyone else is trying to access this directory. When I turn back to the vault, I get a brief glimpse of three humanoid figures. Only one actually had enough detail to look like a person, the other two were low res representations of active counter measures. I call those ones 'goon sprites.' The other one is the avatar of some security runner. The view of them quickly disappears behind an avalanche of noise and lights as the goon sprites overload my system and try to freeze my computer. It all has a rather unpleasant effect on me too as I am temporarily blinded, deafened, and disoriented. It will take a few moments for the shielding in my hardware to filter enough of the noise for me to regain control. What went wrong? I am sure that I did not trip any alarms in the system. Yet they were obviously waiting for me. In fact, I am sure that several sniffers are now trying to trace my connection and I didn't spend a lot of time rerouting my signal. It won't take long for the address of this little apartment to appear on someone's display screen. I'd better move now and figure out what went wrong at a later date.

My filters clear the scene enough for me to see that the security avatar is gloating and also looking at a readout, apparently waiting to get a fix on my physical location. Time to fly. I hit full reverse and am out of the room in a flash, leaving behind what I hope is one surprised security agent. No longer needing to be sneaky, I angle up and head straight for the alarm webs. There isn't any time for the freezing virus now, so I bad my cocoon program. This will keep those spiders from getting tags on me but it doesn't keep the alarms from sounding. As if that matters now. Through the webbing, I race up to the codewall. It's only a one way wall, designed to keep people out instead of in, so I have nothing to fear from it this time. Out of the company site and into the public domain, I race around to some real hotspots in order to throw off any pursuit. They already have a good lead on the apartment, but I want to try and muddy my active signal a little anyway. No point in helping the good guys. After a minute or two, I log out and remove the VR gear.

The apartment is empty. I have no clue where Anarchy went. The closet maybe. My suspicion now, though, is that he is the one who set me up. I doubt the closet holds any kind of escape or salvation. Damn him! Why would he do something like this after all this time? This goes way beyond a prank or a challenge. This was malicious. I have to get out of here and I am afraid to take the stairs, much less use the front door. I wish I could take some of this equipment with me, but he might heve tampered with it. I guess I am going to have to start taking more responsibility for myself and my actions. I hope I can make it to the fire escape. I just might rethink this career choice.

This just may be continued....



untitled
Bryan Wobig

"Feet"
Sculpture by
Nikki Shelow

"Infinite Affliction"
Woodcarving
Benjamin Nelson

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The editorial policy of *Voices from the Valley: A Rock Valley College Journal of the Arts* is to accept for consideration traditional and experimental essays, reviews of film and drama, drawings, photographs, short fiction, poetry, and memoirs. The editorial staff of *Voices* handle and select materials in a confidential and professional fashion. Pseudonyms are accepted. Foreign language poetry is encouraged. Return of manuscripts or art work is ensured when an address is known. Contributors shall

1-23-98

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DEMCO

"Oceans Apart"
(South Padre Island, TX)
Betsy Zibas

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